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SUBJECT: THE LAGOS PORT COMPLEX: FAR FROM SECURE

1. (U) Summary: Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) and Customs officials report marked gaps in security at the Lagos port complex. Access to the port is only nominally controlled, and electronic surveillance and tracking systems are non-existent. Goods are statutorily subject to Nigeria's 100 percent inspection policy, but Customs officials ultimately see only a small proportion of total traffic. The addition of new cargo scanning equipment may improve the situation, but a sea change in port security is unlikely. End summary.

2. (U) The Lagos port complex is the largest and busiest of Nigeria's several ports. It handles 40 percent of all traffic, and many consider it the gateway not only to Nigeria, but also to West Africa. It is one of the world's most expensive ports (second only to the port of New York) and one of its least efficient. Exporters and importers alike face bureaucratic delays and administrative hurdles, wait unusually long for goods to clear customs, and contend with notoriously corrupt officials.

3. (U) The NPA controls the port's physical security. Except for the side fronting the river, the entire complex is walled and topped with concertina wire. Personnel and trucks move through two or three main gates, each of which is supposedly subject to strict controls. It appears, however, that traffic enters and leaves the port with little scrutiny: in a fifteen-minute period during Econoff's presence, not a single truck or person passing through one of the gates was stopped or questioned by officials. The NPA recently issued photo ID cards to employees and port personnel, but demands that they display the cards are infrequent. Captain Stephen Koffi, Harbor Master at the Lagos port complex, says electronic monitoring and video surveillance systems are months (if not years) away. He laments the lack of sophisticated technology but says resources are limited.

4. (U) Customs officials voice the same complaint. Funds are scarce, and with limited staff, the Nigeria Customs Service finds it impossible to conduct thorough physical inspections of all goods transiting the port. N. H. Angyu, Customs Area Controller at the Apapa area of the Lagos port complex, says exports are subject to a cursory inspection at the port gate (a statement that seems wholly inaccurate, as trucks are rarely stopped) and put through a more thorough inspection at the port's export bay. Even then, it is highly unlikely that Customs officials inspect each and every item in each and every container. Customs officials dispense with the 100 percent inspection policy for certain well-known exporters. Instead, they conduct random checks, a practice that violates Nigerian law but fits with international practice. Angyu hopes the early 2004 introduction of container scanning equipment will improve inspections of imported goods, but the machines will not be used (at least not initially) for exports. These, unfortunately, will continue to undergo the usual physical inspections.

5. (U) NPA and Customs officials nonetheless say security has improved over the last few months, mostly due to more stringent port access controls, but shippers and freight forwarders disagree. One shipping company told Econoff that it loses five percent of its imports to pilferage. People walk away with bags of rice, flour or cocoa, and NPA and Customs officials do nothing to stop them. In many cases, the company says, port and Customs officials are part of the problem. The shipping company pays for its own security and is installing electronic surveillance systems, but a small percentage of its shipments continues to disappear.

6. (U) Freight forwarders also recognize gaps in port

security, and many say Customs officials are incapable of effectively tracking or inspecting shipments. An executive at one of Nigeria's leading freight forwarders told Econoff that 50 percent of all imports are smuggled into the country. He also claims that 90 percent of Nigeria's non-oil exports are contraband. Hundreds of containers of putative furniture components are exported every month, he says, but these are often full of raw timber (an export prohibited under Nigerian law) bound for East Asia. The Nigeria Customs Service, the executive asserts, is corrupt from the top down, and companies find it easy to under-declare shipments as long as they bribe appropriate officials.

17. (U) Comment: If this is indeed the case, and if Customs officials depend on bribes to supplement their relatively meager salaries, it appears many officials will have an interest in maintaining the status quo. As such, new cargo scanning equipment may not be as effective as might be hoped (or operate as long as expected). Furthermore, if funds remain scarce, security improvements will move forward only incrementally if at all. NPA and Customs officials are surprisingly optimistic about meeting the 2004 deadline for the implementation of the International Ship and Port Security Standards, but unless political will increases and significant changes occur, meeting the deadline will be difficult, if not impossible. End comment.

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